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INDEX  
TO  
MASSACHUSETTS  
LEGISLATIVE DOCUMENTS,  
1883 - 1899

by  
Leonard Adams  
Government Documents Librarian  
University Library  
University of Massachusetts  
Amherst, Massachusetts

1994

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## INTRODUCTION

This index has been compiled because no complete, cumulative index to Massachusetts legislative documents exists for the years from 1883 to 1899. Legislative documents consist of House and Senate bills, resolutions, petitions, messages and reports, ranging in length from a few lines to one hundred pages or more. The index should prove extremely valuable to anyone doing legal or historical research in the late 19th century.

The only other access to legislative documents from 1883 through 1899 is an index for each year which appears at the front of each bound volume of the documents. These indexes are antiquated and difficult to use because of language and indexing phraseology. The predecessor to this index is Francis Blouin Jr.'s Index and Guide to Massachusetts State Legislative Documents, 1802-1882, which was published in 1972. The successor to this 1883-1899 index is the Legislative Research Bureau's Index to Special Reports Authorized by the General Court, which begins coverage in 1900 and is updated periodically, but limits its scope to only legislative reports.

In order to maintain consistency and continuity, the format for each index entry is the same as those of the Blouin and Research Bureau indexes. The first two digits represent the year the document was issued; the letters, H or S, represent the branch of the General Court; and the number following the letter represents the individual document. Thus, 83H255 is House document number 255 issued in 1883.

Compiling this index was not without some difficult language related problems. Terminology was often archaic and had to be updated. For example, instead of intoxicating liquors, alcoholic beverages was used. Also, mentally ill was substituted for insane and mentally handicapped for such terms as feeble-minded or idiotic. There was also a problem understanding some of the legal terminology involving bankruptcy, contracts and real estate due to the compiler's lack of knowledge in those areas.

Another problem was the lack of consistency with the forms of corporate and agency names, which appeared to be based on the whims of the bills' authors. Cross referencing was one solution, but often the final decision on the form of a corporate entry was based on which name was most consistently employed.

A third major problem was the lack of consistency in terminology used in the documents. Language involving transportation, sewage disposal and municipal utilities, to name a few, got extremely confusing as shifts in terminology evolved over the years.

In spite of the problems it was rewarding and exciting to observe political and social issues emerging and passing away over time. There was a definite emphasis on banking,





insurance, and real estate throughout the entire period. The growth of railroad and street railway industries is also well documented. Local transportation, water supply and municipal utilities become more important as the years progress.

Issues that appeared between 1883 and 1899 that are still with us today include an assortment ranging from abortion and alcohol education in schools to gypsy moth extermination.

Social issues that are well documented include religious freedom, women suffrage, and immigration. While it can be admitted that most of the indexing was tremendously tedious, the discovery of these pearls of legislative history and the knowledge that they would become more accessible to researchers, made the index come alive and take on a purpose that made the whole project worthwhile pursuing.

Finally, while I proofread and edited this index a number of times, being as careful as possible to catch all errors, incidences of number transposition or typographical error may still be present. I apologize for any such inaccuracies and hope they will not hinder greatly the completion of research or problem solution.



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